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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000539

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TUNIS FOR MEPI RO PETER MULREAN, DRL FOR BARGHOUT, STATE
FOR OWEN KIRBY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [KMPI](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: SYRIA NOMINATION FOR LEADERS FOR DEMOCRACY
FELLOWSHIP

REF: STATE 041787

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Post would like to nominate a sole candidate for the Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, Joumana Seif, daughter of internal opposition leader Riad Seif. Although reftel requested that Post nominate at least four persons, the SARG's ongoing crackdown on civil society and regime efforts to limit contact between the Embassy and the Syrian public obliged us to focus our efforts on finding the most qualified candidate who still retains travel privileges. We hope that an exception would be made to the four-nomination requirement and that Ms. Seif would be selected as a fellow (rather than an alternate). We will continue to seek, in the current situation in Syria, to nominate family members of opposition figures who are being persecuted. To date, we have found this candidate and we are looking for others.

12. (C) Joumana Seif has demonstrated her commitment to democratic reforms in Syria, despite efforts by the Syrian regime to quash all such efforts by civil society leaders. We are certain that she would benefit greatly from the program's academic and practical sessions and networking opportunities by exposure to other emerging leaders and democracy activists from the region. We are also certain that she would contribute valuable insights and experiences from inside the Syrian opposition.

13. (SBU) Ms. Seif is currently taking her examinations for the Syrian Bar, which were delayed because of the May 27 presidential referendum, and will complete an official resume and the essays in early June. In the meantime, Post offers a summary of her background and experience:

- DOB Jan 5, 1970
- POB Damascus, Syria
- Married with three children.
- Travel in the MidEast: Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia
- Travel in Europe: Germany, France, Austria, Britain
- Languages: Arabic, French, English

Education:

- 1988-1989: Studied French Literature at Damascus University (no degree received)
- January 2003-September 2006: Law School at the Arab University of Beirut (graduated)
- 2006-2007: Syrian Bar exams

Work:

1992-2000: Assisted her father, Riad Seif, at his factory

manufacturing Addidas goods. Worked in several departments, eventually heading the social services section, establishing resources for the factory's 1,200 employees and their families, including a daycare, medical clinic, cafeteria, educational assistance, and sports facilities. Also assisted her father in international business relations.

1994: Campaign organizer/adviser for her father's successful run for the Syrian Parliament. Joumana created an innovative discussion forum for female voters in a conservative neighborhood of Damascus, an idea that eventually spread throughout the country.

1998: Campaign organizer/advisor for her father's second successful run for the Syrian Parliament.

July 2000-September 2001: Assisted her father in establishing a political salon called the National Dialogue Forum, which was closed by authorities in the fall of 2001 at about the same time that Riad Seif was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for "trying to change the constitution by illegal means."

Fall 2001-January 2006: Served as her father's representative in meetings with diplomats, the media and Syrian opposition figures. Accepted international awards on his behalf, including one from the German government, and attended international human rights conferences.

January 2006 - present: Political assistant to her father, who is the head of the Damascus Declaration group, a loose coalition of illegal political organizations critical of the regime. Assists in public outreach and the establishment of a Syrian National Congress aimed at expanding the membership of the Damascus Declaration group.

CORBIN